

Understanding the Effect of Loneliness on Academic Participation and Success among International University Students

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to assess the effect of loneliness on academic participation and success among 213 students studying at Usak University. A total of 213 international students studying at Uşak University, including 151 males and 62 females, were selected and participated in the research voluntarily. In the study, feelings of loneliness among international students significantly impacted academic participation and success of the students. According to research, feelings of isolation and lack of aspiration for the future significantly affect the academic performance of students in complex ways. Generally, students who have aspirations for the future tend to participate and thrive in school. However, students who feel lonely and isolated tend to spend their time idly and therefore do not thrive in academic environments.

Keywords: aspiration, academic success, loneliness, international student

1. Introduction

Education is one of the most fundamental elements in today's society. According to data published by Unesco, over the past fifteen years, over four million students have travelled abroad for educational purposes(UİS, 2016).

Many people immerse themselves in unknown countries, cultures and challenges to meet their educational needs. However, people are also met with challenges as they pursue education abroad. International education is a profitable economic market and a competitive environment for both countries and universities. A high level of student mobility has led to an increase in economic competition for universities worldwide, having a significant impact for Turkey and its rather newfound acceptance of international students (Arkali Olcay & Nasir Öz, 2016)..

Since 1980, the world has witnessed an increase in international student mobility namely in developed countries with stable political climates (Arkali Olcay & Nasir Öz, 2016)..

Due to the high influx of international students worldwide, there is a strong need for foreign language classes at universities in order for students to assimilate to new learning environments (Sungur et al.2016), (Şeker & Akman , 2015).

University campuses are a hub of new and meaningful ideas, and naturally, where students discover their passions and aspirations for the future. These students not only have more meaningful lives, but they also have a healthier psychosocial life. Generally, having goals helps individuals to maintain a more positive outlook on life (Şahin et al. 2011, Deniz, 2013, Eryılmaz, 2012).

The concept of purpose, which is important in human life, emerged from psychology literature in the 1970's as a subpart of motivation theory. Aspiration is defined as a "desired situation which individuals try to achieve and maintain through cognitive and behavioral strategies" (Emmons, 1999). [8]. Students with aspirations have more motivation in their academic lives -(Suliman & McInerney, 2006).

Teachers monitor students' participation in courses and their progress as well. High exam scores are not the only indicator of effective instruction. Teachers should check the progress of students daily by monitoring attendance and participation in courses (Eryılmaz, 2014).

Adapting to a new environment for international students is often met with much adversity and loneliness is inevitable for many newcomers (Bek, 2014).

Peplau and Perlman (1982) define loneliness as a feeling in which one's relationships do not meet their psychosocial needs and expectations. Therefore, people may feel lonely even when they are surrounded by people. In order to avoid loneliness, people develop coping mechanisms such as constant and excessive eating, shopping, mindlessly watching television and spending their time indolently (Gençtan, 1999).

Individuals experience loneliness at different stages in life. In the words of Yalom (1980) "Everyone comes alone to this world, has to live alone and leave alone". Studies conducted by Sawir et al. (2013). showed that international students experienced both personal and social loneliness. Kiroğlu et al (2010) revealed that almost all international students studying in Turkey missed their home countries. Therefore, loneliness must be addressed on university campuses as a serious mental health issue in order to improve the academic lives of international students.

Today, Turkey offers education in both private and public universities to a number of international students. Although students may expect feelings of "homesickness," many international students are not aware of the significance of the loneliness and isolation they may feel after arriving to their host country (Bek, 2014).

A key component of a healthy psyche involves a sense of belonging and participation in a community

(Seligman, 2002). For international students, participation in academic life serves this purpose. First, class attendance improves academic performance (Eryilmaz, 2015). Secondly, class participation is beneficial for academic performance and psychosocial well-being.

Living in the so-called "information age" means that the most valuable capital is knowledge. Nowdays, young people strive to attain knowledge in subjects they are interested in and ones that prove to be beneficial for career prospects.

Uşak University first opened its doors to international students in 2012. In light of the recent influx of international students, Uşak University has aimed to successfully integrate these students into academic life on campus. According to data obtained from the Office of International Student Affairs, a total of 1,933 international students were enrolled at Uşak University on December 24, (2014). Therefore, in this study, the relationship between loneliness, class participation and academic success was examined. This study aims to answer the following questions:

- Does loneliness affect classroom participation and academic success?

2. Method

This study investigates the relationship between class participation of international students studying at Uşak University and their aspirations and feelings of loneliness.

2.1. Population and Sampling

A total of 213 international students, 151 males and 62 females, were selected at Uşak University in the summer semester of the 2014-2015 academic year. These students' records were taken from the Student Affairs Office to confirm that they were international students. The number of students in each department was also determined from the student records. During the study, classrooms were visited and information was given about the study. International students were also contacted via their friends.

Table-1 Demographic information relating the foreign students studying in Uşak University

Sex		(f)	%
	Male	151	70,9
	Female	62	2,1
Faculty			
	Faculty of Education	30	14,1
	Arts and Sciences	17	8
	Economics and Administrative Sciences	39	18,3
	Communication	9	4,2
	Islamic Sciences	11	5,2
	Engineering	36	16,9
	Vocational High School	9	4,2
	Sports Sciences	4	1,9
	TÖMER (Turkish Courses in Ankara)	56	26,3
Class level		(f)	%
	Preparation (Tömer)	56	26,3
	1st class	14	6,6
	2nd class	111	52,1
	3rd class	32	15,0
Country			
	Turkmenistan	75	35,2
	Azerbaijan	70	32,9
	Kazakhstan	8	3,8
	Syria	6	2,8
	Others	54	25,4
Total		213	100

2.2 Data Collection Tools

In this study, in order to collect personal information about student participants, students completed personal information forms. The following academic articles were used as supplementary material for this study: "Scale of Participation to the Course for University Students" by Eryilmaz (2014), "Determining life goals Scale in the context of positive psychotherapy in adolescent " by Eryilmaz (2012), 20-item "UCLA Loneliness Scale" by Russel, Peoplau and Ferguson (1978) and adapted to Turkish by Ozdasik in (1989) were used Eryilmaz (2012).

Scales taken from academic articles were further analyzed using the Cronbach Alpha internal

consistency technique. The following scales were used for this study: Emotional participation: 84, behavioral participation: 86, cognitive participation: 84, scale total score: 92. The following cronbach alpha values were the following: Emotional participation: 93, behavioral participation: 88, cognitive participation: 90, scale total score: 93. Overall, the results indicated that the scales were accurate. During analysis of the data, regression analysis and T tests were conducted using the SPSS 19 package program.

2.3. Data Collection and Analysis

The course attendance scale and the "Life Goal Scale and Demographic Information Form" were used to collect data in the study. The course participation scale entitled "Life purpose scale and demographic information questionnaire" was applied to students in 16 different universities in Turkey, sampled by the researcher. Before the application, an explanation was given to the students about the purpose of the study and how the scales would be used. After the application, the SPSS 19.0 package program was used for statistical analysis of the data obtained.

3. Results

The results of the correlation analysis showing the relationship between participation in courses, life goals and loneliness are shown in table 2.

Table: 2. Correlation between the Course Participation, Life Goal and Loneliness

		Course participation	Life goal	Loneliness
Course participation	Pearson coefficient	1	.486**	-.238**
	Sig		.000	.000
	N	213	213	213
Life goal	Pearson coefficient	.486**	1	-.136*
	Sig	.000		.047
	N	213	213	213
Loneliness	Pearson coefficient	-.238**	-.136*	1
	Sig	.000	.047	
	N	213	213	213

When Table 2 is examined, it is seen that there is a significant positive correlation between the participation of students and aspirations. $r = .486$, $p < .01$. so, it can be said that high participation of individuals correlates to high life goals. When the relationship between loneliness and life goals was examined, it showed a negative correlation at a low level. $r = -.136$, $p < .05$. so, it can be said that the level of loneliness decreases as the life purpose scores increase. Finally, when the relationship between course attendance is examined, there is a highly significant relationship in the negative direction. $r = -.238$, $p < .01$. It can be said that the level of loneliness decreases as course participation increases

Table: 3. Results of simple regression analysis of the effect of life goals and loneliness on attendance

Variable	B	Standard error	B	T	P
Constant	40.59	5.84		6.95	.000
Life goal	1.034	.134	.462	7.738	.000
Loneliness	-.291	.099	-.175	-2.939	.004

$$R=0.516 \quad R^2=0.266$$

$$F_{(2,210)}=38.064 \quad p=.000$$

According to Table 3, there is a significant relationship between the level of life goals and loneliness of the students and the course participation score. $R = 0.516$ $R^2 = 0.266$, $p < .01$. Life purpose and loneliness variables unity explain 26.6% of variance in participation. According to the standardized regression coefficient (β), life goals are a better indicator of class participation than loneliness. When the results of the T-test on the significance of the regression coefficients are examined, it is seen that participation in the course is predictive of course participation.

4. Discussion

Today, we see that universities both in the Republic of Turkey and around the world are welcoming globalization by offering educational opportunities to international students. Therefore, universities have become more open to diversity (Özkan & Acar Güvendir, 2015). Despite the celebration of diversity, international students still experience challenges as they come from different cultures and geographies. One of the most prominent challenges in adapting to a new country and environment is overcoming loneliness (Bek, 2014). Despite the challenges they face, international students are expected to be actively involved in school and to be successful in achieving their goals.

In this study, the relationship between participation, life goals and loneliness among international

students studying at Usak University was. The results of this study indicate a significant relationship between life goals, loneliness and course attendance of international students. Life goals are more predictive than loneliness in terms of the effect on participation in class. In other words, students with higher life goals are more involved in course activities. The results of this research overlaps with the result of Eryilmaz and Aypay's (2011) research. It was found that determining life goals has a significant effect on motivating students to participate in class.

Life goals and a sense of loneliness among international students also have an effect on course participation. The most predictive of these variables is life goals. If the student has a high level of life goals, course participation is also much higher. If the student is intensely lonely, participation in the class increases. Therefore, it is understood that guidance support can be a helpful tool in encouraging students to participate in class (Bek, 2016).

Since there is a significant positive relationship between course participation and life goals, course participation of individuals with high life goals increases. Eryilmaz and Aypay (2011) has shown the importance of determining life goals in a study and supports the result of this study with that result.

The observation that there is a low negative correlation between loneliness and life goals means that the increase of life goals means a decrease in loneliness. Similarly, a sense of loneliness can decrease with course participation.

The findings in this study indicate that student-focused organizations such as student clubs at universities and student wellness centers may be extremely helpful in addressing the many concerns of international students. Regular counselor meetings with international students may also be effective in decreasing the amount of loneliness they feel, ultimately improving their overall academic experience.

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